

HONORING OUR COMMITMENT TO AMERICA'S VETERANS

- President Bush is committed to our Nation's veterans, and has proposed unprecedented levels of funding for veterans. His Fiscal Year (FY) 2005 budget represents an increase in overall funding for our Nation's veterans by almost \$20 billion – or 40 percent – since 2001. The President has increased funding for our veterans more in four years than funding was increased in the previous eight years. The FY 2005 budget includes a 41 percent funding increase in veterans' medical care spending alone since FY 2001.
- The President also supports tomorrow's veterans and their families. In 2003, President Bush requested \$87 billion in supplemental funding from Congress to help ensure that the American military fighting the War on Terror has the resources, including body armor and other vital equipment, to accomplish their mission. Since 2001, the President's budgets have provided an increase in basic pay for men and women in uniform by almost 21 percent, improved military housing for families living on base, and reduced to zero the average housing expenses for military families living off base.

Honoring Today's Veterans

President Bush is committed to honoring America's veterans who have sacrificed so much for our Nation. Under President Bush's leadership, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has dramatically improved health care services and the disability claims process. The President also kept his promise to reduce the claims backlog and waiting times to receive medical treatment, thereby ending the bureaucracy, delays, and unfair denials that were occurring when he took office. President Bush's VA medical care budget requests enable the VA to meet its core medical mission – to serve those highest priority veterans, including low-income veterans, those with service-related disabilities, and those who need VA's specialized services. The President also honors the families of veterans and military retirees who have made tremendous sacrifices for our country.

➤ Improving Access to Health Care for Veterans

- ✓ **Increased Health Care Service to Veterans:** Since 2001, President Bush's budget requests have allowed the VA to enroll 2.5 million more veterans in health care services, increase outpatient visits from 44 million to 54 million, and increase the number of prescriptions filled from 98 million in 2001 to 116 million as of August 2004. Under the President's leadership, 194 new community-based clinics have been opened since 2001 and are now available for veterans.
- ✓ **Additional Prescription Drug Coverage:** Last year, President Bush took the unprecedented step of allowing veterans waiting for a medical appointment who already had a prescription from their private physician, to get those prescriptions filled by the VA – saving veterans hundreds of dollars in drug costs.
- ✓ **CARES (Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services):** President Bush is seeking to modernize VA facilities and provide more care to more veterans in more places, where veterans need it the most. He has committed \$1.5 billion in the FY 2004 and FY 2005 budgets, and additional funding will be requested in the future to increase outpatient health care services for veterans, build new hospitals, and replace outdated, pre-World War II facilities. The VA is working to better distribute its network of clinics and hospitals, so the vast majority of veterans are within 30 miles of a VA community-based outpatient clinic or similar facility.
- ✓ **Expands Access to Long-Term Care in the Most Non-Intrusive Settings:** President Bush's FY 2005 budget request continues to expand long-term care for veterans through VA facilities, private and state facilities, and non-institutional care programs that allow veterans to live and be cared for near or in the comfort and familiar settings of their homes surrounded by their families.

➤ **More Responsive to Veterans**

- ✓ **Eliminating the Wait List for Medical Care:** This year, the list of veterans waiting more than six months for basic medical care, which peaked at 300,000, will be essentially eliminated.
- ✓ **Cutting the Disability Claims Backlog:** The President promised to reduce the disability claims backlog, and at his request, Congress has provided VA with the resources it needs to reduce claims. Claims backlogs have dropped from a high of 432,000 and are approaching the VA goal of 250,000. The volume of claims decisions per month has increased from 40,000 to 68,000. The average length of time to process a veteran's compensation claim has dropped from approximately 230 days to 160 days. VA is working to meet its processing goal of 100 days this year.
- ✓ **Priority Scheduling for VA's Core Medical Mission:** Treating veterans with military disabilities, lower incomes, and special needs has always been VA's core medical care mission and its highest priority. President Bush's Administration has established a new scheduling system to ensure that veterans seeking care for a service-connected condition are first in line. No veteran disabled in the service of our country will ever be turned away.
- ✓ **Concurrent Receipt of Benefits:** The President twice signed legislation providing "concurrent receipt" of both military retired pay and VA disability compensation for those military retirees most deserving – combat-injured and highly-disabled veterans – finally reversing a century-old law preventing concurrent receipt.
- ✓ **Help for Homeless Veterans:** The Bush Administration has launched a \$35 million program to provide permanent housing, health care, and other support services to our homeless veterans most in need.

➤ **Serving America's Newest Veterans and Caring for Families of Veterans**

- ✓ **Benefits Delivery Available upon Discharge from Military Service:** Under President Bush's Administration, the VA and the Department of Defense have developed a proactive partnership to better share valuable resources benefiting veterans, military beneficiaries, and taxpayers. VA staff is reaching out to 136 military bases to provide America's newest veterans with the services they have earned and to bring about a seamless transition for new veterans from military to civilian status. To date, more than 15,000 veterans who served in Afghanistan and Iraq have been provided VA care.
- ✓ **Caring for Families:** The VA makes pensions based on need available to surviving spouses and unmarried children of deceased veterans with wartime experience. President Bush signed the Veterans Benefits Act authorizing new and expanded benefits for disabled veterans, surviving spouses, and children.
- ✓ **Fulfilling Our Nation's Promise:** Under President Bush's leadership, VA is honoring veterans with a hallowed, final resting place. The President signed H.R. 1516, the National Cemetery Expansion Act of 2003 into law, establishing, within four years, six new national cemeteries in the following areas: southeastern Pennsylvania; Birmingham, Alabama; Jacksonville, Florida; Bakersfield, California; Greenville/Columbia, South Carolina; and, Sarasota, Florida.